

Community Assistantship Program

**Youth Accessibility Plan – Arts
Opportunities for Youth in Duluth**

Prepared in partnership with
Duluth Youth Agency Coalition

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Youth Accessibility Plan – Arts Opportunities for Youth in Duluth, MN

<i>Youth Accessibility Plan – Arts Opportunities for Youth in Duluth, MN</i>	1
Executive Summary	2
Background	2
Project Team	5
Arts/Music Inventory Timeline	5
Survey Findings	8
Number of Activities and Location	8
Types	9
Grades	10
Cost	11
Number of Youth Served	11
Gender	12
Language Use	12
Transportation	12
Accessibility	13
Recommendations	13
Advocating for Youth Programming	15
Definitions	17
Bibliography	18

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Executive Summary

In 2006 the Duluth Youth Agency Coalition took on the task of developing a citywide youth opportunities comprehensive plan in order to address accessibility gaps and barriers to positive out-of-school time opportunities for youth living in Duluth ages 5-18. In January of 2007 I was hired as a Community-Based Research Program (CURA) assistant and was put in charge of completing an inventory of the out-of-school time opportunities for middle school youth ages 11-13 in the arts/music category. My goal was to collect enough data on the current arts/music opportunities that exist for middle school youth in Duluth, and then to analyze what gaps there are so that it could be used for decision makers in the city to take action.

A city wide survey was sent out to organizations in the community. We found that only 59 arts/music opportunities currently exist for middle school youth. Many of the activities that were offered only last between one and four weeks, which mean that the long-term sustainable programs in the arts are lacking for middle school youth.

Background

Most communities feel that having well-rounded adults who play an active roll in making their city or town a better place is a good thing. According to Youth Community Connections, an organization that advocates for youth development, youth need to be given the right kinds of learning experiences in order to develop into active community members. Giving youth the opportunity to take part in community activities that give them interaction with different kinds of people and builds their problem solving skills is crucial in helping them to develop into contributing members of the community. Positive opportunities also improve their school performance and help to make them feel good about themselves and their community. (Youth Community Connections Talking Points 2006) That is why members of the Duluth community, and more specifically the Duluth Youth Agency Coalition (DYAC) took on the task of developing a citywide youth opportunities accessibility plan that would be used to address the accessibility gaps and barriers to positive opportunities for youth between the ages of 5-18. DYAC is a coalition of youth-serving agencies representing after-school programs as well as basic

needs services for youth in Duluth. A lot of their work involves giving youth a voice by addressing issues that impact them. They also serve as a resource for youth needs in the community by linking community members with DYAC programs.

(www.dyacduluth.org)

The accessibility plan came out of a strategic planning session that DYAC held with leaders in the community back in the spring of 2006. Many community members feel that there are gaps to positive opportunities for youth in the Duluth area, but realize there is no concrete data to prove this. By researching and analyzing the opportunities members feel that they will then have the evidence to take to community leaders in order to begin to address some of the gaps that exist with youth programming.

This project was not something that DYAC had experience or expertise at doing, so it was met with a strong learning curve for everyone involved including myself. To get the process started DYAC used the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) as a model for how to develop a youth accessibility plan. PASA is an initiative of the Education Partnership that started in 2004 to create a citywide plan to increase high quality out-of-school time enrichment opportunities for youth living in Providence, Rhode Island. (www.mypasa.org) By looking into the work that PASA did with their project, we realized that we would only have the capacity to inventory middle school youth at this time, and the inventory for all ages would have to wait.

In order to create an inventory of opportunities that are currently available to youth living in the Duluth area DYAC joined with the Parks and Recreation Commission, True North Volunteer Center, Incredible Exchange, and St. Louis County MN Extension Services, to map out a plan. The inventory includes summer, after-school, and out-of-

school time community based opportunities. Inventory of youth summer program opportunities was collected in 2006 and included areas in cultural enrichment and integration, performance arts, creative arts, recreation/sports, technology, education and enrichment, leadership, service learning, mentoring, and camps. Community based After-School programs, which are structured programs that meet three days per week, Monday – Friday from September-May, between 3-9pm are currently being collected. In the near future there will be a more comprehensive plan to inventory not only the arts/music, but also categories in leadership, faith based, jobs/job training, tutoring, camp, volunteer/service learning, education, mentoring, and basic needs. After the completion of the community based opportunity inventories, DYAC will then begin work with the school district to collect inventory of the school based opportunities that occur during out-of-school time. The goal was to collect enough data to determine who doesn't have access to opportunities based on: interest/area, accessibility, gender, age, geography, diversity, language use, cost, and timing. For example; maybe there are 15 opportunities in the arts located in Central Hillside, but only 2 in Lincoln Park. DYAC and its partners would then use this data to map out a plan of how this issue could be addressed, and then share it with leaders and decision makers in the community. Beyond utilizing the data to map and analyze gaps and barriers to opportunities, the data will be made accessible to youth, parents, teachers, and social workers by working with a local information network to include the data into their resource database. The database would then be used as a tool to link youth to positive opportunities in the community. When the inventory is completed for all of the categories there will be a kick-off media campaign in order to educate the public on how important it is to have out-of-school time opportunities.

Project Team

The people that I worked on this project with were Erin DeWitt, Sherry Boyce, Ashley Grossoehme, and Cameron Krueger. Erin was the DYAC facilitator and helped to coordinate the project for everyone by setting up the meetings and providing us with the information that we needed in order to complete our tasks. Sherry Boyce works with 4-H Extension Services, and her role was to provide research guidance and project support. She also took the lead on working with DYAC agencies to inventory the full service youth opportunities. She along with Erin were also responsible for connecting with other members in the community to explain the accessibility plan. Ashley was in charge of collecting inventory for the volunteer/service learning category for youth. Cameron was the creator of our access database which we used to input data from our inventory surveys.

Arts/Music Inventory Timeline

In starting this project I had to spend the first couple of weeks researching on what out-of-school opportunities were and become more familiar with DYAC as an organization. After I acquired this knowledge I was able to get started on developing a contact master list for potential organizations that offered opportunities in the arts/music category. I started by brainstorming possible organizations with DYAC facilitator Erin DeWitt. I was then able to build upon that list by doing research on the internet, as well as checking local papers for listings and advertisements of art opportunities in Duluth. The compilation of potential organizations with arts opportunities were then put into an

excel spreadsheet to keep tracking on contact information as well as helping to keep record of when the surveys were being collected.

When the master list was completed the next step was to create a survey in an excel format which could then be used to email organizations to get information about their programming for youth. We decided as a group that having organizations complete the survey through email would be much more convenient for them then conducting phone interviews. We also met as a group to set guidelines as to which kinds of areas needed to be addressed in our data collection. Then Ashley and myself worked together to create the actual survey in a Microsoft excel document, each tweaking our own a bit to fit our specific categories. The survey questions were created to address “who does or does not have access to an opportunity and why?” There were twenty-four questions covering such things as: kinds of programs offered, when and where the programs were offered throughout the year, as well as who was participating in these activities. I do admit however, that there could be ways to improve the format to make it more workable for the user. It is currently difficult to print, and it is sometimes not easy to read because there are so many questions listed that leads to frequent scrolling when filling out the survey.

Our intent was to collect and code enough data that would provide us enough information to see what accessibility barriers and gaps in arts/music opportunities existed for youth. While collecting the inventory I came across many challenges and realized possibilities to improve the inventory for the future. Our initial survey that we created was missing fields that could’ve enhanced the data that we were collecting. We didn’t include in the survey a place for the organizations to describe in detail the programs that

the offer, which would've helped us out with any future online database. In this case we will have to follow up with these organizations in the future to collect this information. Another missing piece to our survey was a question asking what the goals for improving their existing programs are, and what obstacles are in the way of accomplishing them. By including this in the survey we would've had a much better idea on what the needs are of the organizations offering the programs. The beginning of the survey also should've included information on how their participation in the survey could help their organization. It was stated in many of the emails tailored to specific organizations that were sent out, but it would have also been more effective to include it in the survey itself.

The actual implementation of the survey was not an easy process. For most organizations I would call first and explain who I was and how the accessibility plan was being used to address the needs of youth in Duluth, as well as how their organization would benefit from participating. One of the challenges was to actually get a hold of the right people within the organization. Many smaller organizations like dance instructors were very difficult to get a hold of because most of the day they were teaching classes. When contact was made it was still a long waiting period before the surveys would be sent back to us, which required follow up and reminders to those who wanted to fill out the surveys. All together there were 49 organizations that were surveyed and only 21 organizations completed the survey. There could potentially be many reasons why so many organizations did not complete the survey such as: staff time/resources, timing(close to end of school year), transition times for organizations from school to summer, and maybe some felt that the survey would not benefit their organization. Everyone from the Duluth Art Institute to the Snoodle Ceramic Studio was contacted to

take part in this project. The study included performing and literary arts which included: ceramics, sculpture, painting, drawing, computer animation, dance, drama, instrumental and vocal music, and performance theatre. Some organizations offer several programs while most only offer one or two.

Although we had hoped to collect information from most of the organizations there were many that did not fill out the survey and were repeatedly contacted unsuccessfully. Hopefully in the near future when this project gets more exposure in the community it will entice more participation from organizations who would benefit from sharing its programming information.

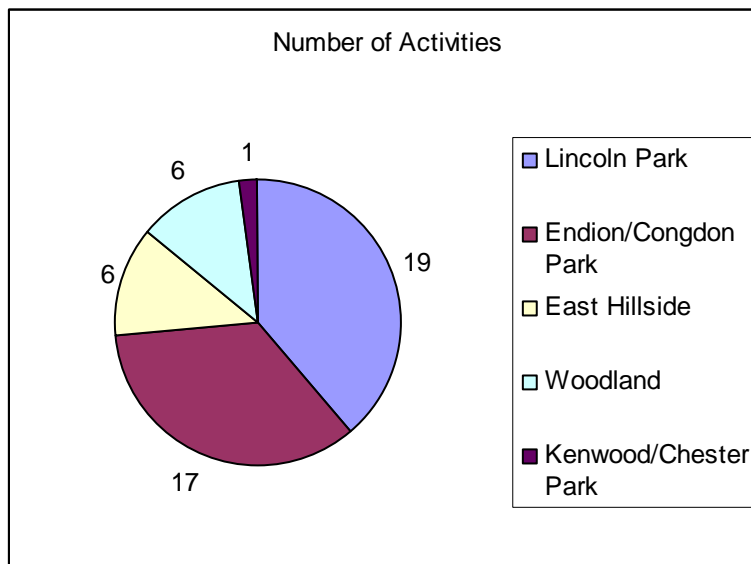
The data collected from the surveys was then transferred into an access database in order to keep detailed record on the out-of-school opportunities. The access database had to be changed a few different times because we would run into problems with coding different items such as cost and types of activities. Cameron Krueger was a huge help in updating our access file so that we were able to have proper record of all our programming opportunities. Once the database was updated and all of the surveys were entered in we were then ready to analyze the data.

Survey Findings

Number of Activities and Location

Out of the 21 organizations that completed the surveys, 17 offered programs in the arts. There were a total of 59 activities of which only 17 were school year opportunities and the remaining take place in the summer. The programs themselves were not spread out through the community evenly. There were 19 opportunities in Lincoln Park, 17 in Endion/Congdon Park, 6 in East Hillside, 6 in Woodland, and only 1

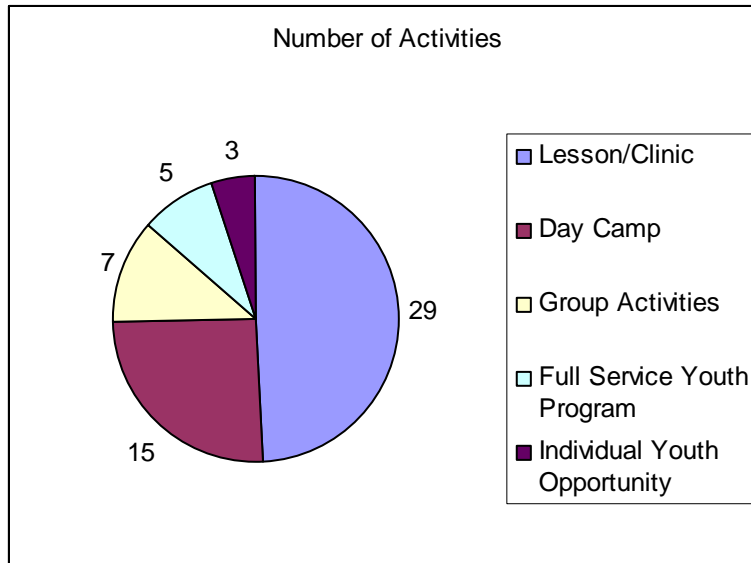
in Kenwood/Chester Park. These results may be due to the fact that only two middle schools (Lincoln Park & Ordean) out of the five that were surveyed that responded with their opportunities. Had we received surveys from Morgan Park, Marshall, and Woodland we might've seen a more diverse layout of opportunities throughout the city. Also, the fact that only 17 organizations out of the 49 surveyed responded might have played a factor as well. As it appears now from the information that was gathered there seems to be more concentration of programs in some areas such as: Lincoln Park and Endion/Congdon Park, and not enough in others like Central Hillside.



Types

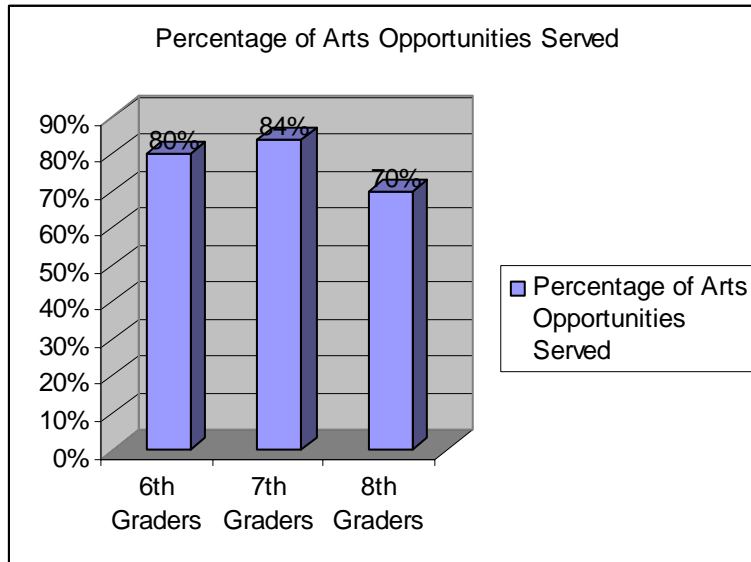
Out of the 59 arts opportunities there were 29 categorized as lesson/clinic, 15 day camps, 7 group activities, 5 full service youth programs, and 3 individual opportunities. This would be of no immediate surprise as it is easy to see why so many opportunities in the arts deal with instruction such as: music lessons and arts and crafts. It is however, quite apparent that there seems to be a lacking of full service youth programming in the

arts, which means that there aren't enough arts opportunities in Duluth that are offered at least three days a week.



Grades

Roughly eighty percent of the arts opportunities served sixth graders. Eighty-four percent served seventh graders, and a little over seventy percent of the opportunities served 8th graders. For the purpose of our project we were only including data for middle school aged youth. We did, however, receive information on many of the surveys that included other grades as well. For example, many of the opportunities that offered music lessons allowed for a wide variety of age ranges to participate, anywhere from kindergarten up through high school.



Cost

The vast majority (78%) of the arts opportunities charge a fee for participating in the activity, and roughly a third of those opportunities offer scholarships. Since the cost of the programming varies so vastly among each opportunity it makes it nearly impossible to make comparisons. Music lessons which charges about \$15 per session is difficult to compare to a painting class that is offered for 2 weeks and charges over \$200. The cost could play a factor in hindering youth participation in many cases, however, there would need to be another survey for parents and youth in order to find evidence for this theory.

Number of Youth Served

The total number of youth served from the data that we received was 1,674. The amount varied from activity to activity. Some programs served as little as 4 youth, while others had as many as 150. Most opportunities served about 10 – 20 youth on average. Some organizations might count participants in a different way however. Some might count those youth who are regularly enrolled, while others may include young people

who might've been one time contacts. What was missing from this data is how many youth participate in the activity at least three days a week throughout the school year. Without this data it is difficult to show how many youth participate in long term, sustainable programs which can be much more effective than opportunities that only last one or two weeks. According to a study completed by the Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time in December of 2004, program sustainability has a large impact on the youth in the community that it serves. The study found that when programs operated on reduced schedules and lasted fewer weeks fewer youth were served and the programs narrowed the age range that was served. It then leads to a weaker connection to meaningful relationships among youth, adults, and peer groups in their out-of-school time. (Mn Commission on Out-of-School Time)

Gender

With the exception of only one activity (dance/baton class), all of the programs offered were open to both male and female genders. Had there been more dance studios that responded to the survey this might have changed the results somewhat. Otherwise, it seems in Duluth at least, most programming in the arts is open to all genders.

Language Use

Unfortunately there was only one art opportunity that used another language other than English, and that was an American Indian Cultural Group program. In order to include more diversity in arts programs Duluth will need to include more activities that offer more languages than just English.

Transportation

Only one organization surveyed was not within five blocks of a bus route, which is a credit to the wonderful bus system in Duluth. There were six activities that provided transportation to youth who wanted to participate in their programs. The problem comes then as to whether or not most youth and parents feel safe traveling on the bus without a parent.

Accessibility

Whereas most organizations surveyed do have handicap accessible facilities, when it comes to staff being trained to work with youth with disabilities, there are very few. In fact, there are only two organizations from this inventory that are trained in this area.

Recommendations

The most obvious concern to me regarding this project is that there are not enough full service youth arts opportunities for middle school youth in the Duluth area. Most of the organizations that participated had programs that lasted between one and four weeks long. While these opportunities do provide youth with good experience in an artistic area, they are not as effective as ongoing programs that improve skills for youth and help them to build on relationships with staff. What is needed I believe are more long term out-of-school opportunities to address the need of enhancing more youth involvement in the arts.

In regards to transportation I believe it would be beneficial to have some type of program that teaches youth good public transportation skills. The Duluth Transit Authority could be involved with training and putting on a presentation for youth and

parents. If organizations will not provide transportation there needs to be some help in making their trips to activities as safe as possible. I would also suggest that there be some sort of subsidizing by the program facility or the city for youth who need to pay for bus transportation.

Since most of the programs appear to be concentrated in areas such as: Lincoln Park and Endion/Congdon Park, it would be worth looking at how we can better accommodate youth living in communities with only a few opportunities. Again, this may be a result of many organizations and middle schools not participating in this survey.

I think another important suggestion would be for the middle schools to somehow connect with organizations that offer out-of-school arts opportunities for youth. This might help to address the need of kids that feel the importance of non-school related programs in the arts are to them. Federal support for after school programming is mainly going to schools, so maybe there is a way for the schools and community organizations to share resources in order to address the needs for youth.

One thing that we had talked about in the beginning of our project was to have some type of focus group activity within the community to sit down with youth and parents and find out what they felt needed to be addressed in terms of youth opportunities. By giving youth a voice in this project and asking them what they would like to see change for opportunities in the arts, I believe would've made this project stronger. Unfortunately we didn't end up having the time to follow through with this, but I would recommend that the next group of people who carry on this project should set up a community focus group.

The youth accessibility plan has been quite a learning experience for all who were involved in this project. There have been many instances when we have discovered through this process on how we could've changed something here or there to make the project more successful. The one major change that I would suggest would be to come up with a more detailed survey for the organizations that offer opportunities in the arts, as well as a detailed case study or survey for youth and parents. This information would give us more information on each organization in terms of their goals, funding, size, as well as information regarding how they feel their programs benefit the youth that they serve. The case study for youth would give us a better understanding as to why they choose to participate in certain art programs. Is it to learn something new or for making new friends? We could also ask questions to youth such as: Does the location of the activity make any determination on whether you will participate? Does the safety of the program play a factor? What makes you want to participate in an activity? We could also collect data from youth on what they feel the gaps are for them in terms of arts opportunities. Maybe more youth want to take part in more hip hop activities versus dance. This is all information that could be collected in a well drawn out case study in the near future for this accessibility plan.

Advocating for Youth Programming

The work that I will be doing after the completion of my Masters Degree in the Advocacy and Political Leadership program at the University of Minnesota-Duluth is to be an advocate for issues that I feel are important in making the world a better place. After working on this project it made me realize that should I decide to lobby or run for public office, I could someday be working to improve youth programming for

communities. This project showed me what impact positive opportunities can have on youth development, and how by addressing the gaps and barriers that they face when finding these opportunities we can begin to solve many of the problems that take place in our communities. It is very clear to me now that the work that Youth Community Connections does at addressing positive youth programming at a state and national level is incredibly important to revitalizing youth engagement in their communities. I hope that at some point in the near future I will be able to take the information gathered from the accessibility plan and work with Youth Community Connections and citizens concerned with youth programming to change state policy in this area. If what communities like Duluth need in order to create more positive opportunities for youth is more funding to organizations that serve them, then policy makers should act in a way that accomplishes this. If communities need more quality programming that is sustainable and beneficial to youth development then local policy makers along with program coordinators, parents, and youth need to coordinate a way to improve and expand existing opportunities for youth. Hopefully I will be able to bring my background in youth programming with this project along with my political advocacy skills to enhance youth engagement in positive out-of-school opportunities in the near future.

Definitions

Out-of-School Time Opportunities - include creative arts and organized sports, service-learning projects, mentoring and tutoring, summer day camps, and volunteer-led initiatives. Out-of-School time opportunities for the purposes of this inventory project are neighborhood based and provide youth with access to healthy and structured environments after school, on evenings and weekends, and during the summer.

Full Service Youth Program - Sites where programming is offered at least 3 days per week, and has at least 5 different categories of opportunities offered.

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